

TRANSNATIONAL LITERATURE

Ken Gelder and Paul Salzman, *After the Celebration: Australian Fiction 1989-2007* (Melbourne University Press, 2009)

After the Celebration: Australian Fiction 1989-2007 is an account of Australian fiction from 1989 to 2007, the year after Australia's bicentenary to the end of the Howard government. It is a sequel to *The New Diversity: Australian Fiction 1970-1988* by the same authors, published in 1989. As with their earlier work, *After the Celebration* is in the nature of a survey with chapters being written by the authors individually. The work brings into purview almost all major novelists writing during the period, and a wide variety of genres too, with the fiction of 125 Australian novelists critically examined.

The Introduction outlines some of the important topics for Australian literary criticism, the changes in the Australian literary publishing scene and the role of writers in public life. It also brings in the notions of transnationality and the local. The first chapter, 'Belonging' by Ken Gelder, explores the various conceptions of home in Australian fiction, combining attention to genre with an analysis of the social and political implications of the fiction under discussion. The work of novelists Arnold Zable and Steven Carroll, the diasporic Australian novel, and notions of authenticity, place and the indigenous are discussed. Aboriginal novels, like those of Tara June Winch and Kim Scott, and the idea of representing indigenous genealogies are also examined in this chapter.

'Recolonising: Historical Fiction and the History Wars,' the second chapter, by Paul Salzman, examines the way the history wars in the new millennium are reflected in fiction that deals with Australia's colonial history and its after effects. Beginning with David Malouf's *Remembering Babylon* (1993), it goes on to discuss postmodern novels about Tasmania, colonial histories and historical sagas, fictional representations and versions of the Kelly legend and other accounts of Australia's racial history as seen in Kim Scott's *Benang* (1999) and Alexis Wright's *Carpentaria* (2006).

Chapter 3, 'Literary Fiction' by Salzman, discusses what is at stake in various kinds of literary fiction in Australia. It also examines the short story and two of the best exponents of Australian fiction, Peter Carey and Brian Castro, and brings into contention the legacies of modernism in some contemporary Australian literature. Postmodern Australian fiction and moral realist fiction are also surveyed in the chapter. Some of the authors discussed in the chapter include David Malouf, Peter Carey, Brian Castro, Frank Moorhouse, Shirley Hazzard, Steven Carroll, J.M.Coetzee, and Jessica Anderson. Since popular fiction is also taken into account in this survey, Salzman specifies what he refers to by literary fiction

'Literary Fiction' is in some respects more an explanatory descriptor than a fixed generic label: covering modernist, postmodernist and realist novels (whether 'hysterical' or moral), works that are fundamentally experimental as well as those that are formally conventionally. (141)

Chapter 4, 'Genre Fiction,' by Gelder, looks at the key genres of Australian popular fiction – crime, fantasy, science fiction, romance and blockbusters. The chapter examines the relationships they construct to place and time – the city, the bush, and other locations, the past and the future. 'Is There a Woman's Chapter?', the fifth chapter, by Salzman, considers the irony of such a category but uses it to analyse issues that intersect with the recent history

Book reviews: *After the Celebration: Australian Fiction 1989-2007* by Ken Gelder and Paul Salzman. Nishi Pulugurtha.

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of literary feminism and genres specifically associated with women writers and their readers. The last chapter, 'Literary Politics,' by Gelder, looks at the role some Australian fiction in the period under survey has played in the wider social, cultural and political debates. It begins with two literary controversies that were built around charges of anti-Semitism, the Demidenko affair and the reactions to Christos Tsiolkas's *Dead Europe* (2005) and ends with two terrorist novels, Richard Flanagan's *The Unknown Terrorist* (2006) and Andrew McGahan's *Underground* (2006).

The book brings under its gamut all genres of fiction, from the rural apocalypse fiction to the terrorist novel, and also includes genres often left out in literary criticism, such as crime fiction, science fiction, romance and chick lit. Gelder and Salzman believe that fiction of all kinds needs to be given serious critical attention. Gelder raises the question, 'Is popular/ genre fiction really so different to literary fiction? The answer to this short question would have to be yes, without question – which explains why we have devoted a separate chapter to literary fiction' (177). Unlike their earlier book where little attention was paid to popular fiction, *After the Celebration* takes a look at the major genres of popular Australian fiction.

It is, however, difficult to bring into consideration all fiction written during the period into one volume and there are bound to be lapses here and there. Antonio Jach's *The Layers in the City* finds mention while Jach's best work, *The Weekly Card Game* (1994) is omitted. Some other notable works omitted include Christopher Koch's *Out of Ireland* (1999) and Nicholas Jose's *The Custodians* (1997) among others. The Preface makes mention of the fact that the authors did not 'intend to make complete coverage a priority' (ix), which means that not all writers could be included. There are interesting accounts of the Australian literary scene along with stories of feuds in the literary arena. What is engaging about this survey is that the social and the political figure importantly in the literary experience.

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